

October 15, 2009

Dear Constituent:

I want to take a moment to address the challenge we face in developing our 2010 Milwaukee County Budget. This will be a very difficult budget, and I truly value your input. Emotions often run high when we as citizens discuss taxes and public services. Too often, the one-liners that make it into the media and the distortions of special interest groups do not tell the whole story. In this letter, I hope to give you a more complete picture of the challenge the County Board faces as we examine County Executive Scott Walker's proposed budget and craft a truly balanced budget for 2010.

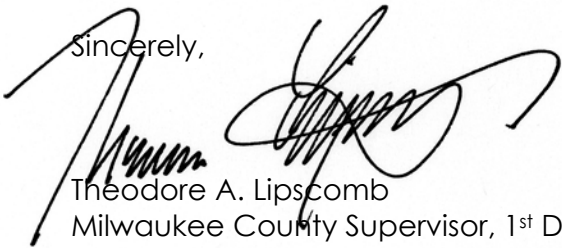
It is easy to make the 0% tax levy increase pledge, but it cannot be implemented without sacrificing services. That is why, despite the rhetoric, Scott Walker's 2010 budget proposes a tax levy that is nearly 18% higher in 2010 (\$257,637,284) than what he proposed in 2003 (\$218,708,524). It is also a misconception that his budget would cut spending; Walker has proposed that we spend \$1,481,577,120 in 2010 - that is a 6.3 percent increase in spending from this year. How can he do that? One way is to accelerate our borrowing by aggressively issuing debt available to him under the federal stimulus bill. Walker proposes that we borrow nearly four years worth of debt in 2009-2010. Hopefully, we will then take a rest to catch our breath!

The Walker budget goes too far in some areas, and yet it still leaves us out of balance. The Director of Audits recently said that Walker's proposed budget has, "...a hole in it that is the size of Montana" and he declared that if passed, Walker's budget would be out of balance on January 1st. This is largely because his budget proposal relies on a 16% wage and benefit cut that cannot be implemented unilaterally, without violating state and federal laws. Some have called it an illegal budget, others a campaign budget, the Journal Sentinel quoted me as saying that it was based on "voodoo math."

Milwaukee County is not a for profit business; we cannot simply cut public safety, courts, jails, and mental health services because we do not want to pay for them. The State of Wisconsin mandates that Milwaukee County provide many of these services, but they leave it to us to pay the bill, this is the relationship between the State and Counties. When the economy is bad, many businesses have fewer customers and lower sales, but the demand for many County services actually rises. High unemployment, foreclosures and crime mean greater demand for our Sheriff's deputies, court services and beds at our House of Correction.

I want to find a balance, seek cost savings where prudent, and maintain mandated services - all options are on the table. I will continue working on your behalf for a responsible budget.

Sincerely,



Theodore A. Lipscomb
Milwaukee County Supervisor, 1st District

